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*First produced at the Royal Olympic Theatre,
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NETTLE CROKER	Mr. GEORGE VINING.
BROWSER	Mr. ADDISON.
JONES	Mr. H. COOPER.
MRS. BREEZELY FUSSELL	Mrs. LEIGH MURRAY.
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MRS. HONEYWOOD	Miss HERBERT.

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DEAREST MAMMA.



SCENE.—*A Drawing Room. Doors, R. 2 E. and L. 1 E.—fire-place, R.—window opening upon a balcony in back flat—tops of trees and houses belonging to a square beyond—sofa, L.*

HARRY CLINTON *writing at a Devonport, L.*—NETTLE CROKER *reading newspaper at fire, R.*

CROKER. "To persons about to marry." Bah!

HARRY. What's that? what's that?

CROKER. "To persons about to marry." I say, like that great philosopher, Punch, don't—don't.

HARRY. (*writing*) At your old grumbles again!

CROKER. Only a soliloquy. What's the good of saying "don't" to you when you've done it?

HARRY. Yes, and I glory in the deed. My Edith is an angel, I tell you, Nettle.

CROKER. Yes, of course—of course! You are still in your honeymoon; and the angel's wings are the natural effect of moonshine. Wait till the moon is set—you'll have plenty of cloud and mist in your matrimonial sky.

HARRY. I defy your prophecies, you lachrymose old Zadkiel! I have fixed my barometer at "set fair."

CROKER. Well, I must admit, if any man had a chance of happiness, you have; you seem to have dipped your hand into the lucky bag, and pulled out a prize, as far as one can judge, at present. Only wait, old boy—the gloss is new—the gilding of the matrimonial pill is not yet worn off. Wait—wait!

HARRY. Go ahead, man—I am too happy to heed you. To-day is my wife's birthday—and as if to make our felicity complete, Edith's dear good mother arrived unexpectedly last night.

CROKER. Mrs. Breezely Fussell arrived! Allow me to congratulate you on this most extraordinary completion of your felicity.

HARRY. Now that's meant for irony.

CROKER. Oh dear, no.

HARRY. We shall make the happiest family in the world. My Edith was always saying, that to have her dearest mamma near her was all she had left to desire.

CROKER. "Dearest mamma!" Hem!

HARRY. Unfortunately, immediately after our marriage, my mother-in-law was obliged to go down into Norfolk, to nurse, in his dying illness, a rich old bachelor cousin.

CROKER. From whom she had large expectations, of course.

HARRY. Well, wasn't it natural? But instead of dying, the poor old fellow recovered. Conceive her happiness!

CROKER. Conceive her disappointment!

HARRY. She was thus enabled to leave him, and come to us. Now she will never quit us any more.

CROKER. Dearest mamma is going to live with you entirely?

HARRY. Entirely.

CROKER. Allow me to congratulate you again. (*rising—shakes HARRY by the hand*)

HARRY. Come, come—have done with your sarcasms; she's a dear good soul.

CROKER. (R.) Well, I dare say there may be some excellent mothers-in-law in the world, although I have never had the pleasure of making their acquaintance.

HARRY. Fancy our jolly party—with dear old Uncle Browser with us too!

CROKER. Oh, I've no objection to the Browser—he's a fossil that would do credit to any family museum. You may put him on his shelf; and he would only sit quiet, and go to sleep. Bless his somnolent qualities!

HARRY. Say, rather, bless his imperturbable good humour.

CROKER. Oh, don't think I grudge him his dormouse faculty. Poor devil! he was kept awake so long during his matrimonial existence, by the tough tongue of his lamented tender half, that he has now got to make up for lost time. She was a model wife, I grant you.

HARRY. Poor Mrs. Browser was not an Edith, I admit. But stop and dine with us to-day; and I'll wager we convert you from your anti-matrimonial heresies between us.

CROKER. I don't mind if I do—I shall have a fine field for observation. But as to my conversion, *nous verrons*.

HARRY. (*rises*) This shall be another surprise to my darling poppet on her birthday—I have prepared one for her already—

my portrait painted in miniature, by her old friend and school-fellow, Mrs. Honeywood.

CROKER. Clever woman, Mrs. Honeywood! I wonder how she contrived to get rid of that bore, Honeywood!

HARRY. Be quiet, do! She is to bring the portrait to-day as a birthday present to Edith. But—it's a secret.

CROKER. Of course you will take Dearest Mamma into your confidence?

HARRY. Well, she is a charming woman—a most sensible woman. But, with all her good qualities, I don't think she's famed for keeping a secret—she might spoil my plot.

CROKER. I should think so! Harry Clinton, my boy, that's the most sensible speech you have made this morning—a woman and a secret—oil and water.

HARRY. Hush! here's Edith!

Enter EDITH CLINTON, R.

EDITH. (C.) My dear Harry— Ah, Mr. Croker! I am so glad to see you. How do you do?

CROKER. (R.) As well as a man can be in such a jarring world. You look charmingly. (*goes to fireplace*)

EDITH. Oh, I am so happy! But I interrupt you. What are you talking about?

HARRY. (L.) Talking, were we? Oh, about nothing—nothing at all!

EDITH. Harry, I see you are keeping a secret from me. Fie!

HARRY. A secret from you? Never, my darling.

CROKER. (*aside*) Specimen of a husband's truth.

EDITH. I don't know whether I ought to believe you—naughty!

CROKER. (*aside*) Specimen of a wife's confidence.

EDITH. (*to CROKER*) Of course, Harry has told you that Dearest Mamma is arrived, and that she is going to live with us.

CROKER. I have already had the honour of congratulating your husband on your good fortune—haven't I, Harry?

(*HARRY turns away.*)

EDITH. She hasn't left her room yet. Poor dear mamma—she was so tired with her journey. How you will love her, Harry!

HARRY. Of course. Don't I love her already? Could I do otherwise, when she has bestowed on me my own dear treasure?

EDITH. He's a good, dear old boy, he is! (*pats his face*)

CROKER. (*aside*) Coo away, my turtles—the dove notes won't last.

EDITH. Oh, we shall be so happy. No dispute—not the

slightest word of difference—all peace, and love, and joy. We shall each have our daily occupations; Harry at his business, I at my household affairs; and in the evening, we shall read, and work, or play a game of whist with Dearest Mamma and Uncle Browser. Sometimes we shall have a few friends—Mr. Croker, you will always be one of them, I trust?

CROKER. The prospect is enchanting—(*aside*) at a distance—at a very considerable distance!

EDITH. (*to* CROKER) I am sure you, too, will like Dearest Mamma—she will make everything so pleasant in the house.

HARRY. (*aside to* CROKER) What do you say now, Nettle?

CROKER. (*aside to him*) Wait—wait!

HARRY. Incurable grumbler!

Enter BROWSER, L.

BROWSER. Where's mamma? where's mamma?

EDITH. Oh, dear Uncle Browser! back from your walk?

BROWSER. My first morning constitutional? Yes, dear, couldn't do without it. Habit, my dear, habit. But where's mamma? She didn't arrive until after ten, and I was in bed, of course.

CROKER. (*aside*) Old dormouse!

EDITH. Dearest Mamma hasn't come down yet.

BROWSER. Tired after her journey, no wonder. Too much locomotion disturbs the system. Well, I shall see her in good time I suppose—I'm in no hurry, never am—it would upset my moral equilibrium.

CROKER. And your moral equilibrium is easily upset, I suppose, Mr. Browser?

BROWSER. Not very easily, sir. I am blessed with a considerable placidity of disposition; and so long as I am allowed to go to bed at my usual time, get my constitutional promenades at the appointed hours, and have my three comfortable meals a day, without any trouble to disturb my mind or interfere with my digestion, I make myself perfectly happy and content with anything.

CROKER. Wonderful effort of philosophy! If all's true that people say, however, that same philosophy must have been sorely tried in the time of the late lamented Mrs. Browser.

BROWSER. A little at first—just a very little; she hadn't the mildest of tempers. She was always worrying, bickering, scolding, tormenting—and that tongue of hers—oh, lor! And when she couldn't find exercise enough for it at home, she always had a safe remedy in taking a sixpenny fare with a cabman. But habit, sir—habit is everything. I got used to the eternal clatter—so much so, that I actually miss it now poor Mrs. B. is gone. Whenever she quarrelled with me—which, by the way, was two or

three times a day, I used quietly to drop asleep in my chair, lulled by the tempest of high words; it was my invariable custom. Habit, as I said, habit.

CROKER. Upon my soul I admire your patience.

BROWSER. Patience, sir? common sense, sir. What was the use of my putting myself out? I should only have upset my equilibrium. (*sits at the fire*)

CROKER. (*aside*) Uncle Browser is a gem! (*goes to window*)

EDITH. Ah, here comes mamma!

Enter MRS. BREEZELY FUSSELL, R.

MRS. F. Come to my arms, my beloved Edith! Oh, my darling child! Good morning, Mr. Clinton—I'm sorry to be so late! it's not my custom, I can tell you. But I was so fatigued—and then I had to install myself in my room.

HARRY. You found everything comfortable, I trust?

MRS. F. Couldn't be better—only I changed the arrangement of all the furniture.

CROKER. That's a beginning!

MRS. F. Kiss me again, my love. To live among you all will be the consolation of my few remaining years. What I have suffered in separating myself from my dear child, none can tell, none but a loving mother. And the plague I had in poor Cousin Towzler's house! Such extravagance, such disorder! And then those vile servants! lazy, insolent, impertinent creatures! (*to EDITH*) You can't imagine, my dear, what they were! I was so glad he got well. If I had had to stop another day, I should certainly have taken upon myself to reform the whole household, by turning every mortal being out of doors.

BROWSER. Oh!

CROKER. (*aside*) Pleasant for Towzler! Bravo, Dearest Mamma!

BROWSER. (*aside*) How her tongue reminds me of the late lamented Mrs. Browser. It's quite refreshing—particularly as she's not here.

CROKER. (*to MRS. FUSSELL*) After this expansion of your amiable feelings, my dear madam, allow me to present you my respects.

MRS. F. Mr. Croker, I think—a friend of my dear son-in-law. Delighted to see you, sir—I've heard of your excellent qualities. (*aside*) A snarling, hypocritical creature. But I'll be a match for him.

CROKER. I've made an impression!

BROWSER. (*aside*) I suppose I must say something pretty, too. (*aloud*) How do you do, mamma?

MRS. F. (*scandalised*) Mamma, indeed! (*putting on a smile*) My dear son-in-law's uncle, I imagine—Mr. Browser?

BROWSER. You've hit it, mamma.

MRS. F. You reside in this house with my children, I believe?

BROWSER. Yes, bless 'em, in peace and quiet. (*goes to fire, and sits with newspaper*)

MRS. F. Delighted to hear it. (*turning to EDITH*) Dear, simple old soul! (*aside*) A mean, cunning serpent, I'll lay my life. (*aloud*) But I haven't had a word with you yet my darling child. Come and sit down with me, and let's have a little chat by ourselves. (*sits on sofa with EDITH*)

HARRY. Don't let us disturb you. Come here, Nettle, I want to talk over my proposed improvement with you.

CROKER. Improvement! You'll have plenty of scope for that very soon, I'll be bound. (*they go up, and talk on the balcony*)

MRS. F. And now, my dear, tell me how you get on. You must have no secrets from your mother.

EDITH. Secrets from you, Dearest Mamma? certainly not.

MRS. F. Well, then, speak out!

EDITH. But I have nothing to say.

MRS. F. Impossible! Do you think your husband loves you as much as ever?

EDITH. More than ever, I think.

MRS. F. I don't like that. Excess looks like pretence. Tell me, how often have you quarrelled since you married?

EDITH. Quarrelled! What an idea! Never once—Harry is always so good-tempered.

MRS. F. Always good-tempered! I don't like that—I'm afraid that looks like hypocrisy! So, then, he yields to you everything?

EDITH. And I to him.

MRS. F. That's a mistake, my love. Too much concession looks like weakness. Now don't speak yet, dear. Who commands here?

EDITH. Commands!

MRS. F. Yes—keeps the purse, regulates the expenses, orders, undertakes all?

EDITH. Oh, Harry supplies me with as much money as I require; and I consult him in everything.

MRS. F. My dear child, what an error! No will of your own! It was high time I came here, it's very evident. Now don't speak yet, dear—a few more details. Does your husband smoke?

EDITH. Oh, yes, I don't object to that. He smokes in his study, or even in the dining room when he has a friend to dinner.

MRS. F. Good gracious! I couldn't have believed it! Perhaps you will allow him a latch key next?

EDITH. Of course! He always has one—it is so convenient.

MRS. F. Oh, I see I must make a thorough reform here. My dear, you are tottering to an abyss—your mother must save you.

EDITH. But, Dearest Mamma—

HARRY. (*coming down with CROKER*) Well, my dear mother-in-law, are you going to keep Edith to yourself all day?

MRS. F. (*rising with dignity*) Sir, I have given my precious treasure to you for life. You surely need not grudge my maternal tenderness a few moments! But I have done for the present. By the bye, come here. (*leads HARRY apart*) Now, between ourselves, don't you think it rather degrading, for a man to mix himself up with household affairs, and interfere with his wife's prerogatives?

HARRY. My dear madam, I never interfere. Edith has the fancy always to consult me. Has she complained, then?

MRS. F. Well, I can't say the dear child has exactly complained; but my maternal heart divines all her little grievances.

HARRY. Grievances! Well, this is the oddest idea. (*goes to speak to EDITH*)

CROKER. (*aside*) Dearest Mamma is going it already, or I'm much mistaken.

Enter JONES, L.

JONES. (*announcing*) Mrs. Honeywood.

Exit after her entrance.

Enter MRS. HONEYWOOD.

MRS. H. Ah, my dear Mrs. Breezely Fussell! this has been an agreeable surprise to us all. Good morning to you, my dear friends! I just called to congratulate you on this unexpected piece of good fortune. Good morning, Mr. Croker—as amiable as usual, I see.

CROKER. I'm not a changeable person, ma'am.

MRS. H. Ah, you are a dear, good-tempered creature! (*to MRS. FUSSELL*) I am glad to see you again, my dear madam. Your presence here will make these good, grown-up children of yours so happy. See how Clinton is smiling, and Edith all sunshine—even Mr. Croker looks pleasant. We are old school-fellows, you know; and what contributes to Edith's happiness, adds also to mine.

EDITH. I know it does, my dear Louisa.

MRS. F. My maternal heart experiences the same conviction. (*aside*) One can see with half an eye the woman is a wretched flirt!

MRS. H. (*to EDITH*) Oh, my dear, how I wish you could have been with me at Lady Twiddle's concert last night—it was

delicious! One couldn't hear much of the singing—you know nobody ever can. People will talk, and it would be cruelty to prevent them. But there was such a squeeze—and I had such a love of a coiffure, quite new from Paris—attracted every eye, and made all the women die of envy.

CROKER. Amiable propensity!

MRS. F. (*aside*) An arrant coquette, as I live!

MRS. H. You know you promised to go shopping with me this morning.

EDITH. I can't leave dearest mamma her first day.

MRS. F. Oh, pray don't think of me one moment, my darling.

HARRY. (*to CROKER*) What a good, considerate soul she is!

CROKER. (*to him*) I never give an opinion too hastily. Wait—wait!

EDITH. No, no, I must—I ought to keep you company.

MRS. F. You shan't, my pet—I will have you go.

EDITH. Well, Dearest Mamma, if you desire it. *Exit, R.*

MRS. F. (*aside*) It will give me time to begin reforming a little; from what I see around me, it's needed.

HARRY. (*aside to MRS. HONEYWOOD*) Have you brought the miniature for my Edith?

MRS. H. (*aside to him*) No, but it's quite finished.

MRS. F. (*aside, observing them*) What do I see?

HARRY. (*as before*) I must have it this afternoon.

MRS. H. (*as before*) I'll take care you have it in time.

MRS. F. (*aside*) Whispering together, I do declare. What can this mean?

Re-enter EDITH, dressed for going out.

EDITH. Now, I'm quite ready. Good bye, Harry. (*kisses him—to MRS. HONEYWOOD*) Come along. (*going*)

MRS. F. (*severely*) My child!

EDITH. Oh, Dearest Mamma, I beg your pardon. (*kisses her*)

MRS. F. Ah, you forget your poor mother now, I see—there, go—go! *Exit MRS. HONEYWOOD and EDITH, L.*

Pray make yourselves at home, gentlemen. If you have any business, don't let me detain you—don't mind leaving me in solitude, I'm used to it.

HARRY. Well, as I have a few little matters to look after, I'll profit by your permission. Come, Nettle. (*aside to him*) A good, dear easy creature, isn't she?

CROKER. (*aside to him*) Easy! so is a new shoe, till you try to walk in it. (*aloud to MRS. FUSSELL*) *Au revoir*, my dear madam—I shall have the pleasure of seeing you again at dinner!

MRS. F. Dinner! Mr. Clinton, does Edith know Mr. Croker dines here?

HARRY. No, but it's all the same thing, you know—Croker's no one!

MRS. F. You seem to forget you are no longer a bachelor, Mr. Clinton. The mistress of a house has a right to be consulted in these matters. However, I'll see that your error is reetified.

CROKER. Good morning, ma'am. (*aside to HARRY*) What do you say now?

Exit with HARRY, L.

MRS. F. He must be got out of these bad habits. I didn't like that whispering with Mrs. Honeywood either. I hope and trust there's nothing wrong there—but I'll have my eyes open. Men are so deecitful! It's high time I put a stop to all these irregularities. That mean, old, sponging Mr. Browser must be got out of the house—that's the first thing to do. What a bore he must be to the poor vietims! These old people are always in the way, and are sure to create dissensions in a family; and I'm determined to establish peace and quiet *here*. Ah, my poor children, it's your happiness I desire, and make you happy I will, in spite of yourselves.

BROWSER. (*putting down the paper, and looking at his watch*) Bless my soul! it's the hour for my second constitutional!

(gets up.)

MRS. F. (*aside*) Why, the old fox was in the room all the time, I deelare—spying and listening, of course. So these are his tricks, are they?

BROWSER. (*going, L.*) Good morning, mamma—good morning!

MRS. F. Mr. Browser, I should like to have a little tranquil conversation with you.

BROWSER. When I come baek, if you please. But it's past the hour for my second constitutional; and if I were to miss it I should fall ill—I know I should. Habit, mamma, habit.

MRS. F. Stay, sir! I cannot suppose that habit can be more powerful with you than the pleasure of obliging a lady.

BROWSER. Well, since you put it in that light—(*aside, looking at his watch*) Ten minutes past! I shall have an attack of jaundiee to a certainty. (*aloud*) How long is the pleasure to last, mamma?

MRS. F. I can't say—it will depend much on yourself, sir.

BROWSER. (*aside*) Will it? Then it won't be very long. (*aloud*) In any case, if you'll allow me, I'll sit down. (*sits*) I hate standing about. Habit—habit! You can sit down too.

MRS. F. Can I? I'm infinitely obliged to you. (*sits*)

BROWSER. Oh, don't name it.

MRS. F. Mr. Browser—sir! has it never occurred to you to reflect upon the inconveniences and annoyances likely to result

from the residence of a third person, even though a relation, under the roof of a newly married couple.

BROWSER. I can't say it ever has.

MRS. F. Now speak candidly, don't you think that such a situation must inevitably lead to mutual constraint, differences of opinion, and finally dissension and separation?

BROWSER. I can't say I do. But make your mind easy, mamma, I am sure your children are delighted to have you with them—I wouldn't think of going away if I were you.

MRS. F. Me! Preposterous! Do you think I was alluding to myself?

BROWSER. Of course. To whom else could you possibly allude?

MRS. F. To you, sir, to you! in your own interest, believe me!

BROWSER. How very kind of you!

MRS. F. I, sir, am a mother, you are not.

BROWSER. Not that I'm aware of.

MRS. F. I am my dear child's natural guide and mentor—she cannot live without me.

BROWSER. Very well—I'm sure I don't object. But stir from here, myself, I shan't; as long as it's agreeable to the young folks I should remain. I love my nephew, my nephew is fond of me—your daughter seems a very good sort of a young woman—

MRS. F. (*indignant*) Young woman!

BROWSER. Well, isn't she a young woman? You are not. But that's no reason why you shouldn't live with us. The more the merrier, provided we can live in peace and quiet, and our equilibriums are not upset. If there are to be any family quarrels, please to manage them all your own way—follow the example of the late Mrs. Browser—but don't ask me to have anything to do with them. There is a nice little room at the end of the garden you can have all to yourself. So that's settled—and let's all be jolly, mamma.

MRS. F. You are determined, then, to stop here?

BROWSER. Tight as a trivet—firm as a rock.

MRS. F. What, when you must know how irksome your presence is to my poor children?

BROWSER. But I don't know anything of the kind—they'd tell me if it were so.

MRS. F. As if anybody would say these sort of things to a man!

BROWSER. Well, are *you* not saying them to me?

MRS. F. That's a different thing. I speak for your good.

BROWSER. Do you? Allow me to differ in opinion.

MRS. F. This is too much. Is it your intention to insult me, sir?

BROWSER. Bless you, I never dreamt of such a thing. But please don't put yourself in a passion—it will upset your equilibrium. (*yawns*)

MRS. F. Well, sir, if you don't choose to take the hint offered in the most ladylike manner, I shall have to take upon myself to get rid of you. I am glad to say I have still some influence with my daughter; and I trust Mr. Clinton will not oppose her wishes. Go you must, sir—and so you had better make up your mind to it at once. My arguments are unanswerable, sir—answerable. I am glad, at least to find that you do not attempt to controvert them. Am I to understand, then, that you give your acquiescence, sir? Not a word! Why his eyes are shut—he is positively asleep! I never was so insulted in all my life! (*loudly*) Mr Browser! (*shakes him*)

BROWSER. (*waking*) Why, what's the matter, mamma? I beg pardon, I believe I was asleep—I fancied I heard the soothing voice of the late Mrs. B., giving me one of her daily scoldings. High words, especially, from a female, always send me off to sleep. Habit, mamma, habit.

MRS. F. Oh, this is outrageous! scandalous! Fall asleep while a lady is talking to you! was ever such behaviour?

BROWSER. (*beginning to yawn again*) Please don't begin again, mamma, or I shall be sure to fall asleep once more.

Enter NETTLE CROKER, L.

CROKER. (*rubbing his hands*) I thought I heard a little refreshing breeze.

MRS. F. No such thing, sir. The miserable old fox has been insulting me, that's all!

CROKER. (*laughing*) Oh, you old zoological curiosity!

BROWSER. Insulting you, mamma? How could I when I was fast asleep?

MRS. F. There, he avows it. But I don't believe you, sir—it was all pretence, to evade replying to my questions.

CROKER. Oh, you naughty old Browser!

BROWSER. I give you my word and honour, Mr. Croker, I was fast asleep. It isn't my fault, if she talked me into a doze; you know my habit.

MRS. F. Enough, sir, enough—spare me any more ribaldry. But once for all, Mr. Browser, either you quit this house, or I—my children shall determine. Do you hear, sir? you or I!

Exit, R.

CROKER. Why, what the deuce is the matter?

BROWSER. Can't tell you. My idea is, that the poor woman

is out of her mind. One thing I did understand—she wants me to turn out of this house!

CROKER. I'm a lachrymose old Zadkiel, am I? The hurricane has come.

BROWSER. But, bless my heart, what does it all mean?

CROKER. Don't you see, man? Dearest Mamma thinks you may be an obstacle to her undivided authority. No two Kings of Brentford on one throne for her!

BROWSER. But I don't want to be a King of Brentford, and sit on a throne! She may sit where she pleases if she only leaves me in peace and quiet.

Enter HARRY CLINTON, L.

CROKER. (C.) Come here, you happy man, and share our joy—we are in such excellent spirits, Uncle Browser and I.

HARRY. (L.) What is the matter?

CROKER. A pitched battle between Uncle Browser and Dearest Mamma. Two to one on Browser! Would you believe it? she wanted to turn him out of the house.

HARRY. Turn out Uncle Browser! I am surprised!

CROKER. Oh, that's only a beginning. Dearest Mamma has plenty more agreeable surprises for you.

HARRY. I must put a stop to this at once. (*crosses to R.*)

CROKER. (L.) Did you ever try to stop an avalanche? Never, I dare say. Well, you are going to make the attempt. Success attend your effort. I shall be in again before dinner; you can then tell me how you succeeded. What happy dogs you married men are! I'm a perverse creature, I know, and with all respect for Dearest Mamma, when I *do* take a wife, it shall be from the Foundling Hospital. *Exit, L.*

HARRY. Uncle Browser! is this true?

BROWSER. Very true, my dear boy. But don't mind me.—do as I do! Let the woman talk—and fall fast asleep!

Enter MRS. HONEYWOOD, L.

MRS. H. Are you alone?

BROWSER. Yes, there's nobody but me.

MRS. H. Edith is gone up stairs to take off her bonnet; and I thought this is a capital opportunity for our little plot.

Enter MRS. BREEZELY FUSSELL, R.

MRS. F. That woman here again! (*crosses to the balcony and hides*)

MRS. H. I was forced to have recourse to a ruse, but I have taken care Edith should not surprise us.

MRS. F. (*aside*) Heavens! what do I hear?

HARRY. (R.) You are charming, as you always are! (*kisses her hand*)

MRS. F. (*aside*) The wretch!

MRS. H. Here is the miniature—(*gives it*) the pledge of unalterable affection—my loving Benedict.

HARRY. How shall I ever repay your kindness?

MRS. F. (*aside*) The monster!

BROWSER. (C.) Let me see it. Upon my word, it's uncommonly like! But take care mamma doesn't find out—she'll be sure to tell your wife.

MRS. F. (*aside*) The profligate old sinner!

MRS. H. I'll leave you now, for fear of a surprise.

HARRY. But don't forget your promise to return for our meeting.

MRS. H. I'll be punctual to a moment.

MRS. F. (*aside*) An assignation, as I live!

HARRY. Let me see you to your carriage. (*crosses to L.*)

MRS. H. What pleasure you must have in this little plot. I can assure you I enjoy it immensely. *Exit with HARRY, L.*

MRS. F. (*aside*) Oh, the vile hussey!

BROWSER. Now, then, for my second constitutional. What a way mamma will be in when she knows it! That woman's mad. I know she is! she ought to have a straight waistcoat on her tongue! *Exit, L.*

MRS. F. (*coming forward*) It's scandalous!—it's horrible—it's diabolical! I knew the woman was a flirt at the first glance. An assignation! I could not have believed it, had I not heard it with mine own ears. And that uncle, too—at his age! I knew he was a loose, profligate character the moment I saw him. Oh, my child—my own, beloved child! I must save you from the impending catastrophe.

Enter EDITH, R.

Oh, my poor child, let me give vent to my tears of maternal grief. (*embraces her*)

EDITH. Good gracious, mamma! What makes you so unhappy?

MRS. F. To see my beloved child thus sacrificed, so young, so lovely—only just married! wretched destiny!

EDITH. You alarm me! What is the matter?

MRS. F. Villainy is the matter! Perjury is the matter—your husband is false to you, my dear!

EDITH. Impossible!

MRS. F. Alas! all things are possible to men.

EDITH. You don't mean to say that he—

MRS. F. He has—and that friend of yours, Mrs. Honeywood

I saw her give him her portrait as a pledge of unalterable love—those were her very words.

EDITH. But Dearest Mamma—

MRS. F. Do you doubt your mother's truth, my child?

EDITH. (*crying*) Harry faithless to me! I see it all now. He has been so mysterious in his manner for the last few days.

MRS. F. And if a man is mysterious, you may be sure he is up to mischief.

EDITH. And to think that it should be Louisa, too, who has caused all this misery!

MRS. F. And that villainous old Mr. Browser is at the bottom of the whole plot—he's their confidant. Hark, I hear them on the stairs! Go to your room, my love, and have your cry out in comfort—your mother will confront and shame them.

Enter HARRY CLINTON and BROWSER, L.

HARRY. Ah, there you are, dear Edith, I was looking for you.

EDITH. Don't speak to me, sir—never speak to me again.

BROWSER. Why, what's the matter, my poppet?

EDITH. Ask your own conscience, you naughty, wicked—wicked, old man.

MRS. F. Leave us, child!

EDITH. (*crying*) You vile, wicked, old man! *Exit R. D.*

HARRY. Perhaps, Mrs. Breezely Fussell, you will have the goodness to explain—

MRS. F. Mr. Clinton—sir! an explanation between us two has become a serious and imperative necessity.

HARRY. Upon my word it has. We were the happiest family in the world; and ever since you have been under my peaceful roof, we have had nothing but discord—I consider I have a right to know how all this change has been effected; I might say more; but out of respect for you—

MRS. F. Respect for me, indeed! I cannot expect it, sir, when you have no respect for the sanctity of your domestic hearth.

HARRY. As I live, I don't know what you mean.

BROWSER. I may say we are quite in the dark.

MRS. F. I know all, sir.

HARRY. All I know is that somehow you have turned the whole family topsy turvey.

BROWSER. Entirely upset its equilibrium.

MRS. F. Oh, I know my presence here is displeasing to you.

HARRY. I never said anything of the kind! I only meant that I love peace and quiet, and that you seem to have destroyed both.

MRS. F. Yes, yes, I am too quick-sighted for you. I see through your designs, and those of your vile accomplice here.

BROWSER. Can't you contrive to leave me out of the affair?

MRS. F. But I am here to tear the mask from your face—and never, never, never will I abandon my poor child, although you try to drive me from your doors. (*calling*) Edith! Edith!

Enter EDITH, R.

EDITH. Dearest Mamma!

MRS. F. Fresh insults—fresh indignities! your husband has threatened to turn me out of doors, my child! but we'll go together—we will wander forth alone.

HARRY. (*angrily*) Grant me patience! I never suggested anything of the kind.

MRS. F. That's right, sir, fly in a passion, do.

EDITH. Do not add insult to injury, sir! Deceive me—betray *me*, if you will, but spare, at least, mamma.

HARRY. But, my dear child, I never deceived or betrayed you.

MRS. F. That's right, sir! add falsehood to treachery.

HARRY. Oh, I can bear this no longer!

MRS. F. I see how it is! your once pure heart has been perverted by that debased old profligate.

BROWSER. Now she's at me again!

MRS. F. At your age to be the instigator of vice! fie! fie, old man! blush for your monstrosity.

EDITH. Fie! fie, old man!

BROWSER. (*seated, yawning*) How can I blush, if I don't know what I have to blush for?

HARRY. Edith!

EDITH. Leave me, sir! Oh, Dearest Mamma! (*clings to MRS. FUSSELL*)

MRS. F. They have chosen well their time to deal the cruel blow—the day of my return—your birthday too!

EDITH. My birthday!

HARRY. (*aside*) There, now she's let that out.

MRS. F. Your natal day, my love! and with a breaking heart, I wish you many happy returns of it.

Enter CROKER and MRS. HONEYWOOD, L.

MRS. H. Here I am, you see, true to my word, and I have made this sweet-tempered soul come with me.

MRS. F. That woman! let us fly her presence! come to my room, and let's have a good cry together. Come, my child, we'll wander forth alone, like the babes in the wood. *Exit with EDITH, R.*

BROWSER. She won't catch me wandering with her.

HARRY. Well, here's a scene! I must follow Edith and learn what it all means! *Exit, R.*

MRS. H. (to CROKER) Can you offer any clue to the elucidation of this mystery?

CROKER. Can I tell how a powder magazine blows up? easily enough, if you throw a firebrand into it. But here's uncle Browser, fast asleep again, I declare! Browser—Browser!

BROWSER. Is she gone? well, I must say, since the lamented Mrs. Browser, I have never met with such a soporific! (*looking at his watch*) Why, I declare, it's luncheon time! I must have my luncheon at my usual hour. Habit, madam—habit!

MRS. H. I wonder you can find an appetite in the confusion around you.

BROWSER. Oh, I'm used to breezes! if you had only heard the late Mrs. B.! Oh, dear—oh dear! breezes indeed! equinoctial gales! hurricanes, madam—hurricanes! *Exit, L.*

CROKER. (*looks at MRS. HONEYWOOD, who sits on a sofa, makes one step towards her, changes his mind, and hurries to the door*) Stop—stop! Mr. Browser, I'll take luncheon with you!

MRS. H. (*after flinging down her parasol*) Mr. Croker! will you have the kindness to pick up my parasol?

CROKER. Now, how the deuce did that parasol come there? (*picks up the parasol very unwillingly, and makes hastily for the door again*)

MRS. H. What, running away from a lady! that's unlike your usual gallantry.

CROKER. Gallantry! what do you mean? I don't deal in the article; besides I can't stop—I'm going to have my hair cut!

MRS. H. Arch hypocrite! I know you better than you know yourself. Your distrust of our sex is all affectation.

CROKER. I beg your pardon—dire experience!

MRS. H. Personal!

CROKER. No, thank my stars—the result of observation.

MRS. H. Through blackened glasses—that's how men look at the sun.

CROKER. As for the sun, the only ray of it I ever saw has been in my own snug home.

MRS. H. Home! another affectation! you bachelors don't know the meaning of the word.

CROKER. Don't we! I should think we did, when we sit cosily by the fireside in a comfortable easy chair with lounging coat and slippers.

MRS. H. Slippers! what are they worth without a dear little wife to work them for you?

CROKER. Hem! no scolding voice—

MRS. H. No soothing tones—

CROKER. No squalling children to break your ear drum—no unruly boys to break your furniture—no flighty girls to break your heart—

MRS. H. No affection—no sympathy—

CROKER. Cigar in mouth—

MRS. H. Well, I admit that's pleasant!

CROKER. You don't object to smoking, then?

MRS. H. I'd light it for you myself.

CROKER. Would you? (*sits down by her on sofa—aside*) Confound the woman, what a wheedle she is!

MRS. H. No soft hand to cool your aching brow—no kindred bosom wherein to confide your sorrow.

CROKER. (*aside*) Plague take her! I wish I had bolted at first!

MRS. H. But with a dear little wife, you see—

CROKER. (*jumping up with a sudden resolution, and bringing her forward*) Mrs. Honeywood, were you brought up at the Foundling Hospital? I mean are you an orphan?

MRS. H. I haven't a relation in the world.

CROKER. Without incumbrances!

MRS. H. Not one!

CROKER. Well, then, my dear Mrs. Honeywood—

MRS. H. Well, then, my dear Mr. Croker—

CROKER. (*turning away abruptly*) Nothing! (*aside*) Croker my boy, don't be a fool.

MRS. H. Oh, I'll make you a convert to the advantages of matrimony yet.

CROKER. Never! catch me looking at a married couple, and calling them happy.

MRS. H. If I do?

CROKER. Make me your slave for life. I can't say anything worse!

MRS. H. Beware! I may take you at your word. But you are getting dangerous. It is I who must run for it now. Good bye—false anchorite—dangerous—dangerous man! *Exit.*

CROKER. Dangerous! I! Well, I'm glad the woman's gone! Shall I follow her? No, I'll stay here and lend a helping hand to poor Harry. There's one thing very certain. Peace will never be established here until Dearest Mamma is got out of the house. Who's to do it? a regiment of sappers and miners would fail.

Enter HARRY, R.

CROKER. Well, old boy, have you vanquished the enemy?

HARRY. No. Edith and her mother are closeted together, and are deaf to all appeals from me. Oh, I shall go mad! (*sits on sofa*)

CROKER. Don't think of such a thing!

HARRY. But what's to be done?

CROKER. I'll send for your wife, and speak to her myself. Perhaps she won't refuse to see me. (*rings*)

Enter JONES, L.

So, there you are, Jones!

JONES. I was coming up stairs, sir, to have a hinterview with master.

HARRY. What do you mean?

JONES. I means simply to say, that I must give warning. Indeed, sir, I may say I comes as hambassador from the 'ole 'ousehold. We all gives warning.

HARRY. Give warning! Why, what have you to complain of?

JONES. Of you and missus nothing, sir. You are gentlefolks—but you'll excuse me, sir, we can't live in the same family with missus's mamma. She's been about the 'ouse all the morning, and down in the kitchen, and actually into my pantry, and counted the spoons. And she's treated us all like a pack of thieves, and taken all the keys, and threatened to turn us all out of the 'ouse, and made such a rumpus, that all the neighbours' hestablishments was out in the hareas to listen—and cut me off my beer, sir; and so I gives warning—and we all gives warning—even the dog's agitated too!

HARRY. Nonsense! send your mistress's maid to tell her Mr. Croker wishes to speak to her here, in the drawing-room, and let her take care that Mrs. Breezely Fussell doesn't hear her.

JONES. It shall be hexecuted, sir. But we gives warning all the same, if missus's mamma is to live here! and we sticks to our words as gentlemen—which it's the maids as well. *Exit, L.*

HARRY. This is beyond bearing.

CROKER. Well, what do you say to the completion of your earthly felicity now?

HARRY. Don't trample on a fallen man. I am miserable when I think how much to blame my Edith has been.

CROKER. Come, be just! It's all Dearest Mamma's doing.

HARRY. But what business has Edith to be influenced by misrepresentation? She knows how I love her. I've a good mind never to speak to her again.

CROKER. Hush! I think I hear her.

HARRY. The dear girl! I'm so glad. But no, I won't speak to her first, at all events.

Enter EDITH, R.

EDITH. (R.) You requested to see me, Mr. Croker. (*seeing HARRY*) I beg your pardon, I thought you were alone. (*going*.)

CROKER. (C.) Now stop a moment, if you please.

EDITH. If I consent to remain, it is solely out of regard for you, sir.

CROKER. Very good. And out of regard for me, can't you intimate, just ever so little, what is the cause of this disturbance?

EDITH. Your friend has, doubtless, informed you.

CROKER. I don't exactly see how he should, seeing that he is completely ignorant of the cause himself.

HARRY. (L.—*coming down*) Completely.

EDITH. He knows perfectly well what he has done.

CROKER. But *I* don't—and it seems I never shall between you.

HARRY. Try your hand with her precious mother—she ought to know.

EDITH. Respect dearest mamma, at least, you cruel man. If I have your affection no longer, sir, I still possess hers. Willingly would I have doubted all I have heard, but that portrait—that token of unalterable affection, is an undeniable proof of your inconstancy.

HARRY. What—what's that you say?

EDITH. I say that Louisa Honeywood gave you a portrait this morning, (*crying*) as a pledge of love.

HARRY. That's true!

EDITH. (*sobbing*) There, he confesses it at last.

HARRY. But it was not her portrait—it was mine.

EDITH. Yours!

HARRY. Yes, painted by her as a birthday present for you. It would have been already in your hands, but for this fearful storm raised by—

CROKER. Dearest Mamma!

EDITH. Oh, my poor, dear Harry, can you forgive me?

HARRY. Forgive you! don't I love you dearly?

CROKER. Bless you, my children! and to think that this is my work! where's my white pocket handkerchief?

Enter BROWSER, L.

BROWSER. Come, I am glad to see the equilibrium has been restored up here, for it has been more than ever disturbed down there.

CROKER. By Dearest Mamma, of course.

BROWSER. Yes, she has been at me all the time I was getting my luncheon—scold, scold, scold!

EDITH. Oh, I am so sorry.

BROWSER. Don't mind me, my dear. I didn't enjoy my luncheon a bit the less.

CROKER. Great philosopher! my respect for Browser increases.

BROWSER. Now she's gone to have another turn at the servants by way of a change. (*noise without*) There, don't you hear?

CROKER. I must say I don't think the roof safe so long as Dearest Mamma remains under it.

HARRY. She'll never go of her own accord.

EDITH. I couldn't hurt her feelings by asking her to go.

HARRY. And I'm sure I wouldn't venture. Now, you, Croker—

CROKER. Well! I think I'm pretty bold—but I'm afraid I am not quite bold enough for that.

HARRY. Then there is no one who would dare—

BROWSER. Isn't there? here, I'm the man. I can stand the clatter of an angry woman's tongue.

CROKER. The very thing. He'll stand firm amidst the volleys of her artillery, and, after the battle, treat with her as a rival power, and object to the annexation.

(*Mrs. FUSSELL, L. heard without.*)

EDITH. But speak gently to her, uncle Browser.

HARRY. And manage the matter delicately.

CROKER. And keep your eyes open, if you can.

BROWSER. Oh, I know what I'm about.

HARRY. I hear her on the stairs.

EDITH. I tremble all over.

HARRY. I'll make a run for it. Come along, Edith.

CROKER. Don't leave me behind. Steady, Browser.

BROWSER. Firm as a rock!

Exeunt HARRY, EDITH, and CROKER, R

Enter Mrs. FUSSELL, L.

Mrs. F. What do I see? my daughter with her unworthy husband.

BROWSER. On the best possible terms, mamma.

Mrs. F. I must rescue her from the traitor. (*going*)

BROWSER. Stop a bit, mamma, before you go after them. I rather think they wish you to have a little tranquil conversation with me first.

Mrs. F. With you, sir? what does this mean?

BROWSER. (*aside*) A good thought—I'll cook her up a dish from her own recipe. (*aloud*) Has it never occurred to you, my dear madam, to reflect upon the inconveniences and annoyances likely to result from the residence of a third person, even though a relation, under the roof of a newly married couple?

MRS. F. Sir!

BROWSER. Now speak candidly! Don't you think that such a situation must inevitably lead to constraint, differences of opinion, and finally dissension and separation?

MRS. F. Do you dare to insinuate, sir!

BROWSER. No, not I—they—that they would feel a great deal happier if you would have the goodness—just to—you know.
(*makes signs of going.*)

MRS. F. So you want me to turn out, do you, sir?

BROWSER. No, not I—bless you, it doesn't matter to me—I am used to a row—I rather like it. It's the young people who have suggested the idea.

MRS. F. I don't believe a word of it. (CROKER *peeps in, R.*)

CROKER. (*aside*) I'll pluck up courage, and come to the rescue. (*advancing*) I rather think it's the case, my dear lady.

MRS. F. You too, sir? My children repudiate me! my children, for whom I have sacrificed all—for whose sake I have refused Cousin Towzler's hand, with all his wealth.

CROKER. What! Cousin Towzler wanted to marry you, and you refused?

MRS. F. I did, sir. A mother's heart does not listen to the dictates of self-interest. I thought only of my children's happiness.

CROKER. (*aside*) Here's a chance. (*aloud*) But don't you see how your children's happiness would eventually be increased by Towzler's fortune? Don't you see that by accepting Towzler, you would make Towzler a happy man, at the same time you would teach your children a lesson, and punish them for their want of appreciation of your merits by withdrawing your presence from them?

MRS. F. There is some truth in what you say, sir—I will punish them—but in seeming only—my mother's heart will still watch over them.

CROKER. And you'll marry Towzler?

MRS. F. Yes, I'll make him happy, with my consent, this very day. (*goes to Devonport to write*)

CROKER. (*aside*) Poor devil! and to think that I should ever be guilty of match making!

BROWSER. (*aside*) What can poor old Cousin Towzler have done to Croker, that he should inflict mamma on him?

Enter HARRY and EDITH, R.

HARRY. (*to BROWSER*) All seems calm—What is she going to do?

BROWSER. She won't go!

MRS. F. Ah! you are there—are you? Ungrateful ones!

EDITH. Dearest Mamma!

MRS. F. I will not add reproaches to the sorrow you must

feel, when you learn that I am about to leave you—but to take once more a husband.

HARRY. A husband! Who can he be? not you, uncle Browser?

BROWSER. Not if I know it!

HARRY. Not you, Croker?

CROKER. Nor I—you may take your oath.

MRS. F. I am about to marry Cousin Towzler; his happiness shall make you feel what you have lost.

BROWSER. (*aside*) Poor Cousin Towzler.

MRS. F. But I shall return.

BROWSER. (*aside*) Goodness gracious!

MRS. F. I shall establish my husband in town; and then I can come and spend a long day with you.

CROKER. I am afraid these long days will be too short for Towzler.

Enter Mrs. HONEYWOOD, L.

MRS. F. Ah, that woman again! (*EDITH speaks to Mrs. F. aside*)

MRS. H. Is the war over?

CROKER. Yes, and a treaty of peace signed. Our young friends are at last a happy couple.

MRS. H. There! you said happy couple.

CROKER. Did I? I didn't mean it.

MRS. H. Shall I claim the forfeit?

CROKER. Let us wait and see if these pledges of happiness are redeemed, and then—

Mrs. H. What then, my good Mr. Croker?

CROKER. Why then we'll wait a little longer.

Mrs. F. I believe, madam, (*to Mrs. HONEYWOOD*) there has been some little misunderstanding here—it is all Edith's fault I assure you—she is so apt to be hasty in her surmises. Take this piece of advice from me, my child—never listen to foolish tittle-tattle, and beware of jealousy. (*aside to EDITH*) Keep your eyes open, nevertheless, my dear.

BROWSER. Well, now it seems our equilibrium is once more restored—I do so love peace and quiet—I think I am a tolerably easy-tempered old gentleman, and not at all inclined to be pugnacious—why should I? I am sure everybody is very kind to me—my nephew and niece do all they can to make me comfortable—and our visitors are my very best friends, and have a smile even for my follies. Now, between ourselves, for I only take you into my confidence—I am willing to become the champion of the family, and fight my battle with *Dearest Mamma* over again if I can only find backers and supporters amongst the kind friends around me.

EDITH.

MRS. F.

HARRY.

CROKER.

BROWSER.

MRS. H.

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